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ABSTRACT

Noting that the role of culture in the development of child attachment provides a provocative arena for debate among a wide array of scholars, this book details two studies of cultural differences in the meanings given to attachment behavior by middle- and working-class Anglo and Puerto Rican mothers. The book reviews the cultural adaptationism and symbolic approaches to studying culture and posits that a symbolic approach may facilitate understanding of the cultural shaping of attachment. The first of the studies described in the book examined perceptions of adult socialization goals, child behavior, and desirable and undesirable attachment behavior among Anglo and Puerto Rican mothers. The second study investigated the impact of cultural values on others' evaluations of attachment behavior as seen in vignettes of Strange Situation Behavior. Participating in each study were separate samples of 80 middle- and working-class Anglo and Puerto Rican mothers of toddlers. The findings provided evidence that culture and socioeconomic status (SES) contributed independently to group differences in long-term socialization goals, perceptions of child behavior, and the evaluation of attachment behavior. Cultural membership provided a broader basis for group differences than did SES or demographic characteristics. The importance of individualism emerged in Anglo mothers' responses, especially with regard to balancing individual autonomy and overly enmeshed relatedness. Puerto Rican mothers were concerned that their children engage in appropriate relatedness, especially with regard to being "educado," or well brought up. Findings suggest that cultural meaning systems provide conceptual frameworks that are likely to be used to interpret emotional cues and experiences. The book's appendix contains the vignettes of Strange Situation behavior. Contains approximately 225 references. (KB)